Great Compassion, Great Power, Great Victory

Luke 7:11–17

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Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, ***do not weep****. Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said,* ***young man, I say to you, arise****. And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, a great prophet has arisen among us, and God has visited his people. And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.*

That is Luke's account of one of the quietest and greatest miracles in the Gospels. There is no request for help in this story. No one sends for Jesus. No one falls at his feet and begs. Two crowds are simply walking toward each other on the same road, one following the Lord out of Capernaum, full of hope, and the other following a coffin out of Nain, full of grief. And Jesus, walking into a funeral he was never invited to, changes everything.

In the verses before this, Luke wrote about the faith of a Roman centurion, a man of great authority who trusted that Jesus needed only to speak a word. Now Luke sets before us a woman with no standing at all, a widow who has just lost her only son, a woman who is not even named. She has no power, no claim, nothing to offer. And that is exactly the kind of person the Lord of glory turns aside for.

There are three great things on display in this short passage. There is **great compassion** in the heart of Christ. There is **great power** in the word of Christ. And there is **great victory** wherever Christ goes. Let us look at each one in turn.

I. Great Compassion

> *As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, do not weep.*

Notice first how much grief is packed into these few words. This woman was already a widow. She had buried a husband once, and now she is burying a son, her only son. In that culture, a widow without a son had lost not only her family but her whole future, her protection, her provision, her place in the community. This is about as complete a picture of human loss and human helplessness as Scripture ever paints. Luke wants us to feel the weight of it before he tells us what Jesus does.

Then comes that simple, staggering phrase, when the Lord saw her. Not when she cried out to him. Not when someone begged him on her behalf. He saw her. Out of a whole crowd of mourners, Jesus sees this one woman and is moved.

The word Luke uses for compassion here is a strong one. It describes something felt deep within, a movement of the whole being toward another person's suffering. This is not polite sympathy from a safe distance. This is the compassion of God himself, walking in human flesh, stopping in the middle of the road because he cannot walk past this kind of sorrow untouched.

And then he speaks to her directly, saying, "**Do not weep**." On the lips of anyone else, those words would be empty, even cruel. Told to a grieving mother whose son is already dead, "Do not weep" would ordinarily be nothing more than a thin comfort with no power behind it. We have all heard well-meaning words spoken over a casket that could not actually change anything.

But when Jesus says do not weep, it is never an empty word. He never tells anyone to stop grieving unless he is about to give them a reason to. His compassion is not mere sentiment. It is not merely feeling sorry for her. It is compassion that intends to act.

Application

Here is the first thing this passage should settle in your heart and mine. The Lord Jesus Christ still sees. He sees the widow, the parent burying a child, and the one walking behind a casket today with no idea how they will carry on. He is not distant from human sorrow. He entered into it fully, and he still turns his attention to those who suffer. If you are carrying grief this morning, know that you are not unseen. The same compassion that stopped Jesus on the road at Nain is the compassion of the Christ who intercedes for his people even now.

II. Great Power

> *Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said,* ***young man, I say to you, arise****. And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.*

Compassion alone could not raise this young man. Many people throughout history have felt genuine compassion at a graveside and have been unable to do anything about it. What sets this account apart is that the great compassion of Christ is joined to the great power of Christ.

Notice what Jesus does. He touches the bier, the open frame on which the body was carried. Under Jewish law, touching a corpse or anything connected with the dead brought ceremonial uncleanness. Any other man doing this would have made himself unclean and accomplished nothing besides. But when Jesus touches death, death does not defile him. Life flows the other direction. Uncleanness does not travel from the dead body to Jesus. Life travels from Jesus to the dead body.

The bearers stop in their tracks. And then comes the word, young man, I say to you, arise. Compare this with the great prophets of the Old Testament. When Elijah stretched himself out on the dead son of the widow of Zarephath and cried out to the Lord three times, life returned to the child, but Elijah was pleading with God to act. When Elisha later raised the Shunammite woman's son, he too prayed to the Lord before the boy revived. Both were real miracles, and both came through prayer to God for the power to do what the prophet himself lacked.

Jesus does not pray. He commands. Young man, I say to you, arise. He speaks to a dead man as you or I would to someone merely asleep, and the dead man obeys. Luke tells us plainly that the dead man sat up and began to speak. This is not a resuscitation brought about by medicine or another's intercession. This is the voice of the one through whom all things were made, the one in whom is life, speaking life back into a body that had none.

Think about how doctors speak at the end of a life. A physician can pronounce a time of death. That is within their authority, a simple statement of fact about what has already happened. No doctor has ever pronounced a time of resurrection. That is not in their power, no matter how skilled or compassionate they are. Yet that is exactly what Jesus does at Nain. He does not plead

for permission to reverse death. He simply speaks, the way a doctor speaks a pronouncement, and death obeys him instead of the other way around. We need to let that sink in! Jesus Christ has all authority over death! What a great joy a believer should have in knowing that truth!

And then that tender closing detail, Jesus gave him to his mother. The same hands that command the dead to rise gently return this son to his mother's arms. Great power in Christ is never divorced from great compassion. He does not perform a miracle to display his authority. He raises the dead so that a grieving woman can hold her son again.

Application

This is no small matter for us to grasp. The Christ who meets us in the Gospel is not a wise teacher offering comfort he cannot substantiate. He is the one who holds authority over death itself. Every fear you carry about your own death or the death of those you love must be brought to this Christ, the one whose word raised a dead man before a crowd of witnesses on a public road. He does not merely sympathize with death. He conquers it.

III. Great Victory

> *Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, a great prophet has arisen among us, and God has visited his people. And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.*

Look at the crowd's response. Fear seized them all. This is not ordinary fear of danger. It is the awe that comes over people when they realize they have just witnessed God himself act in their midst. They glorify God. They say, "A great prophet has arisen among us, and God has visited his people."

That last phrase deserves our attention. "God has visited his people" is Old Testament language, used whenever the Lord came near to save and deliver, as when he visited his people in Egypt to bring them out of slavery. Luke's readers would have felt the weight of that phrase immediately. The crowd at Nain does not yet fully understand who Jesus is, but they speak more truth than perhaps they know. God himself has come near. Heaven has visited earth in this man.

The report spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country. Word of this victory over death could not be contained. And rightly so, because what happened at the gate of Nain was never

meant to remain a private, local wonder. It was a sign, a preview, of the victory that Christ himself would win once for all.

This young man, raised that day, would grow old and die again someday. His resurrection was real but temporary, a restoration to the same mortal life he had before. The victory at Nain points forward to something greater still, the day when Christ himself would lie in a tomb and rise never to die again, permanently breaking the power of death, not just for one man on one afternoon, but for everyone who belongs to him.

Paul tells us in First Corinthians that Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. What Jesus did for the widow's son at Nain, he has done supremely and finally in his own resurrection, and he will do it again for every believer on the last day. Death itself will be raised against, and death itself will lose. That is the great victory this passage points toward, a victory so certain that Paul can ask, with something like triumph in his voice, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

Application

If you belong to Christ by faith, the victory won at the empty tomb belongs to you. You do not walk toward your own death, or the death of those you love in the Lord, the way that widow walked out of Nain that day, without hope. You walk toward it as those who know the outcome already. Christ has visited his people, and Christ will finish what he began. The report spread through Judea then. Let it spread through your own heart now.

Conclusion

Three things stand out from this brief encounter on a dusty road outside a small town most of us could not find on a map. Great compassion, a Savior who sees the grieving and is moved. Great power, a Savior whose word death itself must obey. And great victory, a Savior whose triumph over the grave becomes the certain hope of all who trust him.

If you have never turned to this Christ in faith, hear what the crowd at Nain could only guess at. God has visited his people, not only in that town long ago, but in the person of Jesus Christ, who lived, died for sinners, and rose again, and who calls you today to trust him.

And if you are a believer walking through grief this very day, take heart. The Lord who stopped a funeral procession to comfort one widow has not changed. He still sees you. He still speaks life where there is death. And the victory he won at the empty tomb, he will one day complete in you and in all those you love who belong to him. Do not weep, he says, not because sorrow is wrong, but because he has overcome the grave, and so will you.